

Holy God; Holy Nation

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you for joining us this morning. Let us start with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, Lord, you've brought us to this place. And Lord, we pray that you would quiet our hearts and that you would clear out all the things that are clouding our minds, our schedules, our thoughts, and that you would just clear the path for what you have to say to us this morning from Exodus 19.

We pray that your spirit would be at work, that your spirit would encourage us, that your spirit would correct and help us as we seek to hold you as a holy God and to serve you correctly.

And we pray these things in your holy and awesome name. Amen. All right, so we finished phase one of Exodus, the first 18 chapters. That is everything to get Israel out of Egypt and up to Mount Sinai, which is where we are now.

Phase two is gonna be all the things that happen around Mount Sinai. So you have the commandments and the laws and the tabernacle and all the things that go in it.

All those are gonna happen around Mount Sinai. Now, Exodus only goes up to chapter 40. They actually stay around Mount Sinai for much longer, but we won't stay with them that long.

[1 : 2 1] So what is the importance of this chapter as we look at it this morning? As we begin phase two of Exodus, what's the point? Chapter 19 of Exodus is a transitional point for the people of Israel.

So they've been freed, as you know, from generations of slavery and brought into the wilderness. Not so they can just be let go, go where they want and live a life however they see fit.

No, God has freed them to be a nation set apart for himself. He's rescuing them from themselves, from their sin nature, from their current course of destruction and self-centeredness and placing them on a course leading them towards holiness and blessings from God.

The problem is they don't know how to relate to a holy God. And chapter 19 begins that process of teaching them that, preparing a people to live holy lives in the presence of a holy God.

And while this chapter is for and talks about the people of Israel, it doesn't take us long before we realize that what's being taught and the truth there are helpful for us in our lives today.

[2 : 3 4] So Exodus 19 is the passage for this morning. If you would stand with me, we're going to read Exodus 19 together. On the third new moon, after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.

They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain while Moses went up to God.

The Lord called to him out of the mountain saying, Thus you shall say to the people, thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.

And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all the words that the Lord had commanded him.

[3 : 55] All the people answered together and said, All that the Lord has spoken, and we will do. And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever.

When Moses told the words of the people to the Lord, the Lord said to Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day.

For on the third day, the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it.

Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot. Whether beast or man, he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.

So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, Be ready for the third day. Do not go near a woman.

[5 : 07] On the morning of the third day, there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

And the Lord said to Moses, Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to look, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them.

And Moses said to the Lord, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it. And the Lord said to him, Go down and come up bringing Aaron with you, but do not let the priest and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them.

[6 : 28] So Moses went down to the people and told them. You may be seated. These are the words of the Lord and his word for us this morning.

So our passage this morning is going to be broken up, and we can see these breaks as we go through this chapter. They're going to be the promises from God, preparation for God, and the presence of God.

So let's look at the promises from God first. I'm going to flip back. You won't have to, just to make it quicker. I'm going to jump back to Exodus chapter 3, verse 1.

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

And as we skip a few verses down, this is where God is meeting Moses in the burning bush. And God has called him to Pharaoh, and Moses said, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Egypt, the children out of Egypt?

[7 : 40] He said, But I will be with you, this is God, and this shall be a sign for you that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.

So we find in chapter 19 at the very beginning, they are at this mountain. This reminds us, it reminds the people of Israel that what God promises, God completes.

It is here where God is preparing for himself a people, a people to worship and commune with him, preparing them for the covenants and the laws that he was going to give to them, preparing a people to live holy lives in the presence of a holy God.

As the people arrive to the mountain, they set up camp. And you'll notice in verse 3 that Moses goes up to the mountain to hear from God. I think it's interesting for us to pause there and think about that for a moment because what do we commonly do when we get to a new place in our life?

A place that God has led us. A new job, a new place of residence, maybe a new program of study that you were accepted into.

[9 : 00] Do we pause and listen to what the Lord has for us to hear and where he's moving next? Or I think our default mindset is to dig in, get busy, and what are my plans going forward?

Moses gives us a good example here because he doesn't set up his tent. He doesn't make sure his hammock is facing the right direction or see how social media is doing, but he goes up to hear from God.

And as he seeks God, God has a message for the people. First, God wants to remind the people of who they are. It says, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel.

Same group of people, two different phrases. The house of Jacob being the weakest of all the patriarchs, least stable. And so God is reminding them of their humble beginnings, but also warning them of that instability that they need to watch out for.

He also calls them the people of Israel, pointing out the nation that they had become. God also wants to remind them of what he has done for them up to this point.

[10 : 17] In verse 4, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians. How I showed up. How I rescued you from Pharaoh and his army in a way that you would never have expected or have ever seen or will see in the future.

That's what I did for you. He's not only reminding them of his protection, but his providence. You saw what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

This imagery of a majestic bird, strong and powerful, able to care for its young while at the same time a lethal bird of prey.

He's saying, I cared for you. I divinely led you to myself. And it is my strength and my power that has kept you alive and brought you to this place where you are now.

Now, it's important that we point out God's faithfulness to his chosen people before they start obeying and living for him.

[11 : 29] Because God doesn't demand obedience and say, if you're good enough, I'll love you. If you do all the right things, I will protect you. No, God says, I will choose you.

I will show you my love. I will rescue you. And because of that, you will be a nation of people different than all the rest. God did that for his people and he's still doing that for us today.

Romans 5.8 says this, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. If you were not a child of God today, if you were not a believer in Jesus Christ, but you are here, somehow you feel drawn to seek God, that is God's work already happening in your life.

And I would encourage you to continue to push on. Connect with someone today. Pray. Ask questions. Learn about how you can know God more.

In verse 5, we see the actual promise that God is making with them. Verse 5 says this, Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.

[13 : 01] Everything on the earth is the Lord's. whether we want to let go of control or not. All things, all people, God's possessions.

He says, but you will be my treasured ones, my chosen people of all my possessions, of all my people, you will be my treasured ones.

I was reminded of walking down a beach where there's just shells all over the place. You can take any of them, but you choose selective ones.

This one I want. This one will be my chosen possession. The difference is we usually pick those shells because they're pretty or they match some project we want to do.

God doesn't pick us because we're pretty or we're bringing the right traits and power to his plan. He picks us out of his sovereignty for his will.

[14 : 02] He also says in verse 6, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Priests, as you know, mediate between God and the people.

And the people of Israel were to be the ones who would mediate the blessings of God to the rest of the nations. The nations would know God better if the nation of Israel lived as God called them to live.

Ultimately, they would mediate the blessings of God because the king, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come from the nation of Israel.

Along with being a kingdom of priests, God says that you shall be a holy nation. You will live in the world, but you are to live different from the world, set apart and holy, distinct, defined for a purpose, for God and his glory.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus in the New Testament, connects this promise, this calling to those who follow Jesus. 1 Peter 2, 9 and 10. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[15 : 36] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. That was fitting for the Israelites.

It was written and given to us, Jews, Gentiles, after the cross of Christ and we are part of that as well. So we see that Moses comes down the mountain.

He calls the elders of the people together and he delivers God's message to them. Verse 8 gives us their response to that message. All the people answered together and said, all that the Lord has spoken we will do.

And Moses reports those words of the people back to the Lord. God has given his promise, his covenant, they've accepted it. Now what happens?

Verse 9, the Lord says to Moses, behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever. It's at this point where God is moving his relationship closer to the people.

[16 : 47] They've accepted his question of obedience, his covenant towards them. They said that they will accept and follow.

And so God moves closer to them. Not only that, but God is saying, I've been speaking through Moses this whole time. He's your mediator, but I want you to know that the words that I have been given him are the words that he's been given you.

So when you hear Moses, you're hearing me. you can trust him. As God is planning to draw closer to his people, there's one problem and it's the main point of this passage and that's God's holiness.

As he draws closer to the people, he cannot allow them to approach as they are. His perfection, his majesty, his holiness cannot allow it.

If we think of the sun as an example, not exactly the same, but helpful, its existence is critical for everything that lives on the earth.

[17 : 58] Yet if we were to stare at the sun too long, we start to burn our eyes and risk permanent damage. If we stay outside too long, our skin starts to burn.

If we were to try to travel or fly closer to the sun, we would either die from the heat or the radiation, depending on how you attempt to get there.

But we can't say to the sun, sun, why are you so harsh? I mean, you're 93 million miles away, I just want to get a little closer and study you and know more about you.

we know that it doesn't work that way. In several ways, that's what it's like with God and his holiness. We can't approach anything, we can't approach him in any way that we want.

There are limits, there are requirements that are in place and that was true for the Israelites, it's true for us as well. Our second point is preparation for God.

[19 : 07] As they have gone through the promises from God and they have accepted this covenant, they get into this preparation phase. People must prepare themselves before God can come any closer to them or they get any closer to God.

Verse 10 says, the Lord said to Moses, go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

The Lord says, go tell the people to get ready. Not just go get ready because I'm going to show up in an hour or two, but I want you to spend time preparing for my arrival on the third day.

We see there are several things that they are called to prepare, get prepared for for this meeting. The first one is they were called to wash their clothes. It might not seem like a big thing, but the idea was to have a mindset of holiness.

As much as possible, prepare to meet me with an earthly level of cleanliness. Don't come wearing the same clothes you always wear. Don't come and show up with the dirt and the spoil and the filth of everyday life.

[20 : 30] Next, he wants to point out their schedules and their priorities. And telling them that he is coming on the third day, he is saying, I want your thoughts to be focused on meeting me.

I want you to be anticipating my arrival. There isn't anything more important than meeting your God. I want your schedule to be adjusted and set so that I'm at the center.

That is what a holy God desires and requires. God should be the center of our schedules.

Everything moves and happens according to God's will and according to God's direction. Whether we see it, want to believe it, or not, if God is not the center of our life, if he is not the center of our schedule and our thoughts, then we have replaced him for another God.

If he is Lord of our lives, then he will be the center of our lives. And that means our schedules and our time and our thoughts. After God gives these preparations to the people, we see that there are also warnings about the mountain.

[21 : 53] We saw a similar warning when we looked at the burning bush. God tells Moses, take your sandals off because the ground around the bush is holy.

We'll see it later when we get into the tabernacle. You've heard about the holiness surrounding the ark and the covenant and what the people could not do.

there were things that God's people, even though they were God's people, they could not do. They could not come near or touch certain things that were connected to God's presence and his holiness.

And the mountain was no different. Verses 12 and 13 says, and you shall set limits for the people all around. Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it.

Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him but he should be stoned or shot, speaking of a bow and arrow. Whether beast or man, he shall not live.

[22 : 54] God had chosen Mount Sinai as the place where he would come down and speak to his people. And for that reason the mountain was set apart. It would become holy because the Lord's presence on it would make it holy.

And it needed to be treated that way. In a similar way, this should remind us of our call to be holy as Christians.

See, we are touched by God's holiness as a Christian because the Holy Spirit lives inside of us. 1 Corinthians 6, 19 and 20 says this, We want to live holy lives because the Holy Spirit who is holy dwells inside of us.

It makes no sense that a Holy Spirit live inside of us while we live a life that is filthy and sinful. Not that we won't live a life that we won't be perfect but we strive towards perfection.

We strive towards holiness. As for the mountain, they were told to set limits around it. I don't know what that was.

[24 : 16] It could have been they drew a circle around the whole mountain in the dirt or maybe they went around and put stones around it. But something that would remind them don't go any further.

The mountain is about to be God's holy place. If they touched it, they would defile it and God says the penalty of that is death.

The point of all this was to prepare the people for this meeting but also what was coming. God was coming to dwell with them in the tabernacle and so he's preparing them their thought process, their way of life how to live in the presence of a holy God.

So we see in verse 14 and 15 that Moses goes down the mountain. He consecrates the people. They wash their clothes. He tells them to get ready. And then he says there's this odd phrase added on.

He says do not go near a woman. Now just a couple comments on this phrase. First is it sounds like that's not what God said.

[25 : 28] Moses, I think you added that on. If we took a few minutes to dig into this passage a little bit more we would see that there is not different messages but there's summaries.

Summaries of what God said. There's a summary of what Moses said. The two aren't identical but if we put them together we can get a better idea of the message that God has for his people.

So we believe that Moses is giving this message that God said includes don't go near a woman. Now in saying that I want to say this isn't a slam towards women.

This isn't anything bad. This isn't some sexist social distancing rule that's going on. Nothing negative at all. It's all about marital relations a couple not coming together prior to meeting with God.

And this was for two reasons. The first was to help them align with the idea that they were to get themselves ready prepared to meet with God.

[26 : 36] No distractions. You and God. You and God. You and God. Get ready to meet with God. Secondly it was also we haven't gotten to it yet because we'll see it in Leviticus chapter 15 but there will be laws there will be rules about how relations between a man and a woman because of bodily fluids that would make them ceremonially unclean.

So we won't dig into that we'll save that for a different sermon but these rules are being laid out here to get them ready for this separating themselves becoming clean before they come and meet God.

Preparing them again for this meeting at the mountain but also meeting in the tabernacle afterward which would go on for much longer. An infinite holy God sharing space with sinful people.

They needed to prepare we need to prepare before we come and meet a holy God. Our third point is the presence of God.

It was now the third day the time when they were to be preparing for God's coming and God begins to show up. There's lightning thunder and as they looked at the mountain there's a thick cloud around the mountain.

[28 : 18] I like thunderstorms personally. A lot of our kids like thunderstorms. It's usually in the safety of sitting on a porch or inside a house. Imagine yourselves at the foot of a mountain and a thunderstorm comes out.

Not just any thunderstorm but a thunderstorm that God is bringing about. And then there's this loud trumpet blast. Have you ever heard you're standing somewhere and unexpectedly somebody blasts a trumpet?

It is unnerving. It is very difficult to take. It sends chills up your spine if you're close enough and it's loud enough. That was their signal to go and meet God.

And in verses 17 and 18 Moses brings the people out of the camp to meet God and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire.

Here it says the Lord descended on it in fire. If we look back at verse 9 it says that he was coming in a thick cloud. Seems like there's two different images here but if you remember as we've gone through the book of Exodus the Lord has showed up in a fire and in a cloud together.

[29 : 41] It happened at the crossing of the Red Sea. It happened as God led them through the wilderness. It will happen as the tabernacle shows up and it happens here. God descends on the mountain and there's smoke going up like a kiln.

Like a hot oven that's made hot for a purpose and smoke is coming up from it. As God comes down so powerful in this event that the whole mountain trembled greatly.

I don't know if anybody here has been in an earthquake. Any earthquake? A couple? I've been in one but it was really tiny. I didn't really feel anything. I just kind of saw a bush shake. I thought it was the wind.

But imagine being at the foot of the mountain. A mountain that is not supposed to move. And you're in thunder and lightning. And this huge cloud of fire and cloud is coming down on the mountain.

And the mountain is shaking as you stand there. there. Verse 19 the sound of the trumpet grew louder as Moses speaks and God answers him in the thunder.

[30 : 50] There the Israelites stand around the mountain as observers and participants in this terrifying and awe inspiring meeting between them and a holy God.

A holy God that called them out there. there. And as they stand there, Moses again called up by God to receive another message.

We see that in verses 21 and 22. The Lord says, go down and warn the people lest they break through to the Lord to look and many of them perish.

Also let the priest who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves lest the Lord break out against them. God wants Moses to warn the people again not to try and get closer.

Don't move closer to the mountain. Don't try to get a look at me any more than what I've already given you. There are specific directions here also for priests which we haven't seen up until this point so we're not sure how they serve but they're directed to consecrate themselves.

[31 : 57] Maybe they stood in front of the people as between the mountain itself and the people I don't know but they like the rest of the people could not come any closer. Moses answers God by saying oh the people wouldn't do that because you warned us not to you told us not to come near the mountain you told us to set limits.

This response actually is a little comical as you think about all the times that the people of Israel have forgotten God forgotten what he said or just not obeyed him. It also seems that maybe Moses doesn't quite grasp the severity of God's command to keep them at a distance.

It's like when you know the danger surrounding something that someone else doesn't quite get. Like telling a two-year-old not to try to plug in a power cord.

They've seen it happen. They could probably do it but they don't understand the danger around that outlet. That it could kill them if it's not done right.

Moses says no no no they get it they'll be fine Lord. But God knows the thoughts of the people. He knows their propensity to disobey and do what they want.

[33 : 19] It's at this point where God could have given Moses a little holy shove down the mountain and said listen go warn the people because I'm serious. Don't get any closer.

But instead God is gracious and he gives Moses kind of a way out. A reason to go back down the mountain. He said listen go down and come up bringing Aaron with you and give the people another warning not to get any closer.

And that's what Moses does is he obeys the Lord and goes and tells the people. See God is not just a little bit bigger a little bit stronger than us.

He's also not a genie that we just rub when we need something. How we view God how we treat God how we live for God should reflect his perfection his power his majesty his holiness.

goodness. That's what the Israelites had to learn. It's what we are learning as Christians as followers of God. This morning we have some flowers over here on the table.

[34 : 39] I actually prayed for these flowers this morning. I had an example to end our message this morning and I couldn't find flowers that I liked and so I said God if this is a good illustration that's helpful I need flowers.

So I come in this morning and there's flowers. So I asked before I did this I'm not just going to like destroy the flowers but I'm going to take one. I'm going to take a flower here.

This bouquet of flowers represents mankind. Beings created by God with limited abilities and with timelines that are already marked out by God.

How long they'll be, how short they'll be. What God did for the Israelites and what God is continuing to do today and all through history is to set apart, to take from mankind people he desires to be set apart for him so that his glory is known in a fallen, self focused and dying world.

Like a light, like a city on a hill. We are still people. We're just called to live separate. Different from the world.

[36 : 09] We're still people like the world, called to live differently from the world. We have been set apart to live wholly for the glory of God.

Let's pray together. Lord, we're thankful for this chapter and for the seriousness that you've placed around your holiness.

We may never completely grasp the depth of your holiness, of your majesty, of your power, of your other worldliness.

You are so different from us. Lord, we pray that you would help us to learn that day by day, to grow in that, to understand you are a holy God.

You are also a loving God who provided a way of salvation. But you have called us out to live lives that are different. So Lord, we pray that you would help us to do that in a way that brings you glory.

[37 : 16] That shows the world around us your glory. That you would be magnified, Lord. We pray these things in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.